

**Transport Strategy in South
Manchester and East
Cheshire**

**Think piece for discussion
by Keith Buchan,
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Introduction

Having completed a number of studies in the South Manchester, East Cheshire, and Derbyshire areas for organisations concerned with sustainable transport including the North West Transport Roundtable (NW TAR), the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), Campaign for Better Transport (CfBT), and Friends of the Peak District (FPD), it has become clear that a number of road schemes are being brought forward in isolation from one another which have a potential major strategic impact and potentially threaten the development of sustainable transport policies. They have different sponsors, such as the Highways Agency, the SEMMMS team (led by Stockport MBC), and Cheshire East Council. They are also at different stages of planning and implementation. They clearly interact with one another, and it would be wrong, and risk wasting public (as well as private) money, if their different sponsors were to obscure their real impact.

Most recently, in January 2014, the Department for Transport (DfT) joined this list of sponsors by announcing a feasibility study into Trans-Pennine routes all of which cross the Peak District National Park. This begins by discussing all modes, but then states:

“The modal scope of the study will be predominantly road-based and would need to consider potential investment proposals on both the strategic and local authority road networks.”

It would appear that DfT is adding to the piecemeal approach, both in terms of the limited area under consideration – most traffic in the National Park does not arise from local residents and businesses – and in terms of treating superficial problems rather than underlying causes of congestion and pollution. This in turn impacts upon what is a key natural asset critical to both the local economy and the health of people throughout the region.

This note is meant to take a more strategic view, and draw attention to the issues, so that an informed debate can take place. This debate should focus on:

- the cumulative strategic impact of these schemes on road users, traffic flows and traffic growth
- the cumulative strategic impact of these schemes on environmental resources, including Green Belt, non-designated open countryside and the Peak District National Park
- the cumulative impact on air quality and climate change in the identified sub-regional area
- how far the proposed road schemes will alter mode choice, in particular away from sustainable modes
- whether there is serious double counting of benefits due to their being assessed in isolation from one another, impacting on whether they are really value for money
- whether better value for money alternatives should be developed, both in terms of the economy and the environment

This means that rail schemes which are being progressed, or which have been proposed, or planned (e.g. in SEMMMS) but not implemented, should be fully included in any assessment.

Context: the South East Manchester Multi Modal Study (SEMMMS)

SEMMMS (2001) is quoted as the justification for implementing individual schemes (road or public transport), broadly because they were part of the recommended package. The strategy, and all the schemes within it, was seen as a unified whole, and the package would have to be completely reviewed if parts were not to be implemented.

It is now clear that some of the rail schemes are not proceeding, but key road schemes are. Further details are given in Annex A. The demand for these road schemes has been predicted on this basis, and thus must be higher than in SEMMMS. Calls for a strategic alternative approach by environmental NGOs such as CfBT, NW TAR, FOE and CPRE have been rejected on the grounds that SEMMMS looked into alternatives and supported these roads. The point here is that they were supported as a result of using traffic models that predicted very high traffic growth some of which has not materialised and with the absolute condition that they were part of a package. However only parts of the SEMMMS package are now going ahead. The argument that SEMMMS can act to avoid a consideration of alternatives which complies with national appraisal guidance (and thus requires a full Options Report) is completely flawed.

National Park, Green Belt and Jodrell Bank

The map on the following page of this note shows the different schemes which have been identified, plus the recent announcement of a trans-pennine study through the National Park. It shows these in relation to the Green Belt and the Jodrell Bank zone, in which development which would interfere with the telescope's functions should be avoided. Manchester University has to be consulted on this and the zone is sometimes referred to as the "consultation zone" as well as the "exclusion zone". It is clear that the schemes, particularly if associated with new development, have the potential to damage the Green Belt and Jodrell Bank.

A series of proposals

While the SEMMMS schemes are proceeding, with Stockport Borough Council the lead authority, there are other agencies which are involved. For example, the A556 has a major upgrade promulgated by the Highway Agency which has just completed its National Infrastructure Planning Public Examination. This revealed that there was significant strategic re-routeing and traffic generation (the exact details of the latter were not fully calculated). Many of the benefits of this scheme would be affected by the implementation of the other road proposals to the East. If it goes ahead, it will be critical to ensure that the area of the model or 'Area of Interest' for the other schemes are not constructed in a way which obscures such double counting. Given the A556 example, this could easily be the case. While serious cuts are still being made to public expenditure, it is more important, not less, that value for money is achieved and the evidence for this can be understood and audited by the public at large as well as interested organisations.

The schemes identified for this report are:

- SEMMMS schemes:
 - A6 (Hazel Grove) to Manchester Airport Relief Road dual carriageway
 - A6 Stockport North-South Bypass to Hazel Grove
 - A523 Poynton Bypass/ Relief Road

- A556 new alignment dual carriageway link between M6 and M56 with junction improvements
- Schemes included in the Cheshire East Draft Local Plan:
 - Congleton Link Road
 - South West Macclesfield distributor road (and associated new development)
- Schemes identified in the 'Engine for Growth' document (which also includes the above)
 - A536 Congleton – Macclesfield
 - A534 Sandbach – Congleton

In addition, the Trans-Pennine study, which is transparently road based, could open up the possibility of other connecting routes which could have major impacts, both in the National Park and locally in East Cheshire and South Manchester. The point here is that, SEMMMS, which created a multi-modal package, has not been implemented in full, and that the new proposals deserve at least a similar level of attention. The schemes are shown on the map which follows (Figure 1)

It should be noted that there are several sections of dual carriageway already in existence which connect to the proposals shown on the map. These are:

- Motorway spur to Manchester Airport (Junction 5)
- A555, which connects the two solid red routes just North of Handforth
- A523 Silk Road which runs Northwards from Macclesfield towards Poynton.


Figure 1: New strategic impact road schemes in East Cheshire and beyond




Key

SEMMMS:


Planned: 

Planning application: 


Cheshire East Local Plan:

Part of development 


In consultation 


A556 (completed National Infrastructure Planning Public Examination) 


Engine for Growth

A536 Congleton – Macclesfield 

A534 Sandbach – Congleton (also in Cheshire East Local Plan) 

New Department for Transport trans-pennine study 

Jodrell Bank consultation zone 

Green belt shown thus 

Summary of the schemes

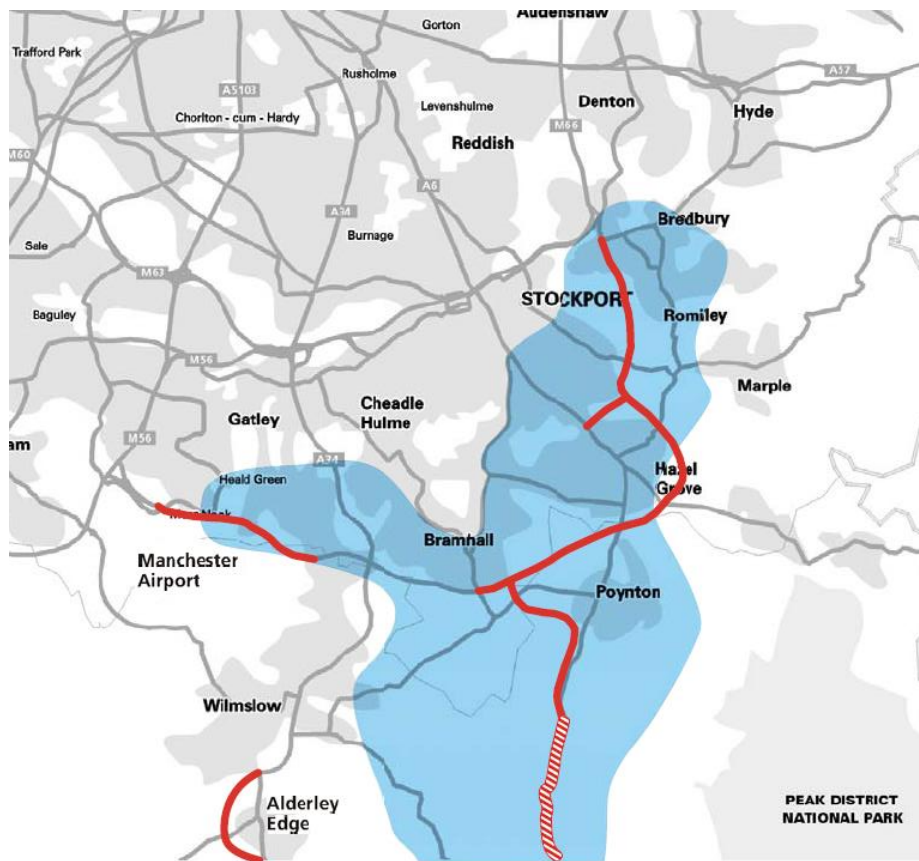
Some further details of the schemes identified above are set out below.

1) SEMMMS schemes:

- a. Manchester Airport to Hazel Grove dual carriageway (now called A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road A6MARR). This has been through public consultation and is now going through the planning application process. The gap in between the two sections is already dual carriageway.
- b. Stockport North-South Bypass to Hazel Grove: dual carriageway linking the M60 to the new A6MARR
- c. Poynton Bypass/ Relief Road: details of the precise route and scale are awaited, SEMMMS suggested a new single carriageway for the North/South section to Adlington, then on line improvements.

The schemes are shown on the map below, which is reproduced from the SEMMMS final report.

Figure 2: Extract from the SEMMMS report (Figure 7.1)



2) A556 new alignment dual carriageway link between M6 and M56:

This includes junction improvements as well as an off line section. The modelling suggested widespread changes in traffic patterns across the region. In summary, medium and longer distance traffic in the A556 corridor increased by 26.3% in 2017 and 28.5% in 2032 as a result of building the scheme. The modelling never revealed how much was newly generated or how much was re-routed car traffic, but the impact is quite clearly very significant and bound to impact across the sub-region.

This was despite the relatively narrow North/South area which was modelled at the full level of detail. This suggests high sensitivity of traffic levels to road schemes in the sub-region.

The other issue is that the Benefit to Cost ratio for this scheme is relatively low, just above 2. If any of the traffic which has reduced journey time as a result of the scheme (whether diverted or on existing roads) would save journey time as a result of the proposed Cheshire East road package, the benefits resulting from the A556 would have to be reduced to avoid double counting, and vice versa. This illustrates the problems of the piecemeal approach in identifying the real costs and benefits of the schemes. Since much of funding is from the taxpayer (although the funding “pots” are often diverse in name) value for money should be a key issue.

3) Schemes included in the Cheshire East Draft Local Plan:

- a. Congleton Relief Road
- b. South West Macclesfield distributor road and new development

Exact alignment and scale are not yet available, at the moment the plan states:

“As well as maximising the benefits of Crewe as a national rail hub, substantial new road infrastructure will be required to open up the east of Cheshire and connect the M6 with main settlements and surrounding major roads. For the road schemes, at this stage only corridors of interest for their routes are indicated. Detailed alignment will be included in the Site Allocations document.”

The Plan also supports A6MARR and increasing capacity of M6 Junctions 16 and 17.

4) Schemes identified in the ‘Engine for Growth’ document

This document is produced by Cheshire East Council and is non-statutory but it forms part of the evidence base for the evolving Local Plan and includes schemes which are to be funded from various sources, specifically:

- a. A536 Congleton – Macclesfield
- b. A534 Sandbach – Congleton

In fact the *Engine for Growth* document appears to be part of the Cheshire East input to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for Cheshire and Warrington. It refers to the LEP as follows, stating that Cheshire is:

“Part of the Cheshire & Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), already giving access to over £13m Growing Places Fund and expected to be the conduit for future public funds - UK and European.”

The LEP will control a significant amount of UK national and European funds which will be available to support its economic strategy. This in turn includes road infrastructure. The LEP has set up its own Local Transport Board (LTB).

5) Trans-Pennine Routes Feasibility Study

This has been announced very recently and while rail is mentioned it is road based. It states that the Government is:

“committed to carrying out a number of feasibility studies to tackle some of the most notorious road hot spots in the country.”

It goes on to say that:

“The feasibility studies will look at these problems in detail and identify potential schemes to solve them. They will be progressed alongside the Highways Agency’s Route Based Strategy programme which is considering the current and future performance of the network. When taken together they will inform future roads investment decisions as part of the Roads Investment Strategy development process.”

This appears to be another isolated study into ‘hot spots’, which are defined as the locations of congestion, rather than identifying the underlying causes of the problem and devising means of addressing them. This approach is critical if value for money is to be achieved, and the structured approach of defining transport problems without preconceptions as to how they might be solved is enshrined in DfT (and Treasury) guidance. For example, the Webtag Unit *An Overview of Transport Appraisal* states in para 1.4.2:

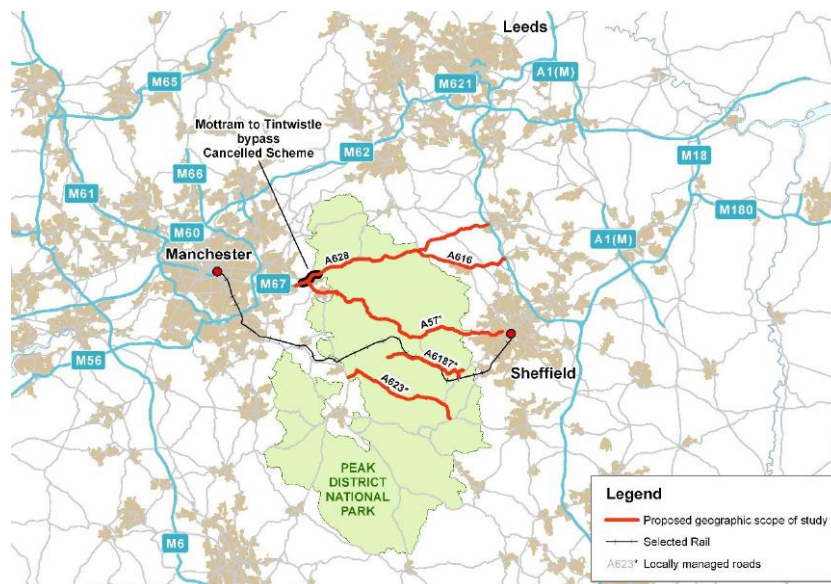
“Before commencing a transport study, a clear mandate needs to be established setting out the rationale for the transport intervention. Once this mandate is created, analysts need to establish the study objectives and consider a broad range of options in early stages; these are then sifted against a set of criteria to shortlist preferred options.”

It goes on to say, in para 1.4.3:

“The design of the process ensures that, before any decision is made about an intervention, promoters and assessors have considered whether there better ways to achieve the objectives that the intervention is set out to achieve.”

The area of the study is reproduced below. It clearly shows the relevance of the development of any new North South high capacity route immediately to the West of the National Park to that study and to the levels of traffic attracted through the Park itself.

Figure 3: Trans-pennine study area



To put this in perspective, the difference in travel time between the motorway route between M6 Junction 17 and the A628 (the cancelled Mottram Tintwhistle scheme on the map) is about 9 minutes faster in free flow conditions, but varies with the levels of congestion. It is however longer, by around 7 miles. The series of North/South schemes will reduce the time difference and possibly make the new route faster instead, as well as being shorter. In terms of road users, the additional

traffic attracted would cause disbenefits to many as well as time savings to others. This could include increasing congestion for the local businesses the schemes are designed to benefit.

Conclusions

In effect, a major new north-south route is being created leading from the south east corner of the M60 (junction 25) in Stockport through to the M6 in mid Cheshire (junction 17). Together with the planned A6MARR and possible East West road capacity increases through the National Park, this will have a very significant impact on traffic patterns throughout the sub-region, and thus on the economy and the environment. At present these impacts are not being assessed.

It is clear from the map and the available documents that there are:

- A range of sponsoring organisations pursuing different paths to implementation
- Funding appears to be from different sources but is in the main from the taxpayer or local authority sources including developer contributions
- Linked together these schemes show the creation of a de facto new North/South strategic route with East West connections
- No strategic view is being taken of the serious cumulative impact on
 - sustainable travel patterns
 - environmental impact.
 - use of sustainable travel modes
- Without a strategic view of the package of road schemes, in concert with the trans-Pennine road feasibility study, value for money cannot be determined.

Recommendation for discussion

The recommendation must be that a full multi-modal study, environmental impact and carbon impact study should be undertaken, given the large scale of investment and the creation of a new road corridor through East Cheshire. This must include a transport model of the entire sub region and an appraisal of the impact of transport on land use planning (including longer journey lengths), as well as the impact of new development on transport networks (a much more restricted view).

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